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ABSTRACT

How an elementary school (pseudonym, Sunny Days Elementary School) initiated school restructuring using the School Restructuring Process Model developed by Charles Reigeluth was studied, using formative evaluation to see how the actual experiences of the school might refine and improve the model. The model follows a three-phase process from initiation and preparation, through design and development to implementation and documentation. The researchers collected and analyzed documents, studied videotapes of the school's Renovation Committee, and interviewed committee members (six parents and six teachers). Although the three proposed phases of the model were retained, modifications were proposed for the initiation and preparation phase to increase assessment of the readiness of the community, better understand the current context, create a more stable membership and develop knowledge bases of members, and develop the design culture. The proposed additions must be tested in other school contexts to see if they are beneficial and worth retaining. (Contains 30 references.) (SLD)

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Title:

Initiating School Restructuring: A Case Study.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine how Sunny Days Elementary School (a pseudo name) initiated school restructuring using Dr. Charles Reigeluth's School Restructuring Process Model. The purpose of this study aimed to examine how the actual experiences of Sunny Days Elementary School could be used to refine and improve Dr. Reigeluth's process model.

Background

School Restructuring.

Our rapidly changing economy, environment and society are changing the expectations placed on public schools (Reigeluth, 1992). Public schools are being asked to do more with less resources than ever before (Sizer, 1989 & Governors Task Force). In order to meet these new and changing challenges, schools are turning to restructuring as a way of changing how they deliver educational services. Jim Oglesby indicates we are actually asking public schools to "re-invent education" (Oglesby, 1993).

Unfortunately, our schools have little experience in restructuring or "re-inventing education". Many schools are finding themselves unprepared to implement the types of changes restructuring requires. Schools are increasingly turning to models for assistance and guidance for their restructuring efforts. Dr. Reigeluth's process model was designed to offer such guidance.

Reigeluth's Process Model.

Reigeluth's model recommends school restructuring follow a three phase process. These phases are:

Initiation/Preparation Phase

1. Assessing the readiness of the community.
2. Get an outside facilitator.
3. Get commitment from all stakeholder groups.
4. Select an approach for the change effort.
5. Select participants for the coordinating council and design team.
6. Prepare the participants.
7. Relate with non participants.

Design/Development Phase

8. Find common values and analyze learner and societal needs.
9. Develop core ideas and goals.
10. Develop an image, and design a systems of functions.
11. Design enabling systems.
12. Analyze the feasibility.

Implementation/Documentation Phase

13. Plan the implementation.
14. Implement the design.
15. Document the system.

Although the activities in each phase are not considered linear or independent of one another, the model does suggest the phases build on one another.

Significance of the study

The findings of this study are intended to generalize beyond Sunny Days Elementary School to the process model itself. Formative evaluation has proven very successful in improving materials, in this case it was applied to a process model. By using this case as a means to formatively improve a much needed process model, future restructuring efforts will be benefit from a better model to guide them as they attempt to initiate school restructuring.

This study focused on the initiating phase of school restructuring and sought to understand how Sunny Days Elementary School initiated their restructuring process. Factors that influenced Sunny Days' efforts in starting the process were identified and analyzed. Recommendations for modifying Reigeluth's process model to better serve Sunny Day's Elementary School are presented. The following research questions guided this study.

Research Questions

This study investigated the following questions:

1. How does what they are experiencing match Reigeluth's model?
2. Does Reigeluth's model represent the significant events of their experiences during the initial phase of restructuring ?
3. Are other events occurring during this phase that are not represented by the model?
4. What obstacles are they encountering and what inferences can be made about they process form these obstac.
5. What strides are they making and what inferences can be made to the process concerning these strides?

METHODS

Research Design

The need to explore school restructuring in the complex setting of actual public schools is important to understand the rich interaction of the many factors involved. A case study methodology was selected for this study due to its ability to examine the dynamic processes of school restructuring. Formative research methods were used in order to identify possible improvements to Reigeluth's process model based on insights generated by the case study.

The researcher served as a process facilitator at bi-monthly meetings of the Renovation Committee at Sunny Days Elementary School. The Renovation Committee was a group of six teachers and six parents that volunteered to serve in an advisory role for the school restructuring the renovation of the school building. Their bi-monthly meetings were video taped. The video tapes were analyzed to identify themes and patterns of interactions which were used to guide and focus the formal and informal interviews.

The researcher collected and analyzed documents created by the staff of Sunny Days, including materials developed in their committee meetings. Written communications to parents and community members, such as, news paper articles, notes sent home with students, etc., were collected and analyzed.

Informal interviews were conducted and focused on how the school came to be involved in this process, what other options they considered and how they see the process progressing. These interviews often took place before and immediately after the committee meetings.

Committee members were also interviewed using more formal interview techniques. The interviews sought to validate the accuracy of the researcher's observations and gather addition information about what they were experiencing and how they were making sense of what was happening. The interviews asked participants to reflect on the process of

restructuring and offer suggestions for improving the restructuring process. These suggestion were used to identify possible refinements to Reigeluth's process model.

Sample

Sunny Days Elementary School (a pseudo name) was selected for this study because of their interest in Reigeluth's model and their acceptance of the theories supporting the model.

Sunny Days Elementary School is located in central Indiana. It houses grades k-5. A faculty of 14 full time teachers, 2 part-time teachers, one principal, one secretary and two custodians provide educational services to approximately 340 students at Sunny Days Elementary School.

Students at Sunny Days come from a rural area that consists of 98% white, English speaking families. In the past, agriculture was a major industry in the area. Like most midwestern rural areas, agriculture is providing fewer jobs than in the past. An increasing number of residence are commuting to the metropolitan city 30 miles away for employment. The area has unemployment rates typical of many midwestern, rural communities. However, their unemployment and poverty rates are lower than the national averages, but greater than the cities around them.

The school consists of one building which was constructed in the early 1960s. This 30+ year old building no longer meets building codes or the needs of students, faculty and staff. Opportunities to utilize technology is greatly limited by the current condition of the school building. Faced with a major renovation project, the principal and superintendent chose this opportunity to re-examine how educational services are delivered in Sunny Days Elementary School.

Sunny Days is one of four elementary schools in their district. Two elementary schools and two secondary schools in their district have received sizable state and federal grants for implementing educational innovations. These schools and the school district as a whole, are considered innovative and progressive by local and state educational agencies (Dave Wilkinson, Indiana Department Of Education, 1992). Sunny Days is one of the last schools in the district to remodel and to make fundamental changes in how they deliver educational services.

FINDINGS

1. Leadership

The words and actions of the principal were not congruent. The principal's take charge actions were in opposition with her desire to create an empowered staff. The principal continued to make decisions and control activities the committee could have handled. They were told to take charge and make decisions, but were not allowed to do so.

2. Power of the driving force

The renovation of the building provided a powerful driving force for the restructuring effort. Unfortunately, at times it was easier and more interesting to focus on paint and carpet colors than on the future direction
of education.

3. Time

The amount of time available was a problem. The volunteers were meeting on their own time after work. This also meant the quality of

the time was diminished. The participants were tired and reported not having the energy they would have liked to have had to devote to this project.

4. Short term, planning focus

While this group stated they were interested in long term improvement, they continued to focus on short term quick fixes. The complicated solutions they considered were often closely related to past experiences, many of which had not been successful. They appeared to want results that were different from those in their past, but were hesitant to try new methods. Primarily, their focus remained on individual learning and what they themselves could do in the privacy of their own classroom. Learning as a group and sharing information that could lead to a stronger more responsive school was difficult for the participants.

Implications for the process model

1. Assessing readiness occurs on two levels

The facilitator and instigators must assess the availability of resources and commitment. They will initially make a "go/no-go" decision. Once the decision to "go" is made and the design team formed, they must make a different type of assessment. This assessment must focus on the current context and "what" should be done and "how" should they do it.

2. Preparing the participants and the team

Stabilize team membership

Most volunteer groups will need assistance in stabilizing the team membership. A few participants are likely to drop out and a few are likely to join late. Closing any gaps created by those who leave and orienting those that join late is very important. Group productivity is improved by a degree of cohesiveness. Participants coming and going from a group prevents cohesiveness from developing.

Develop knowledge base

Community members and teachers may not be up to date on what is considered good educational practices. Helping them develop a common understanding of instructional and educational issues is crucial to their ability to interact with stakeholders during the design and implementation phases.

Develop communication skills

A school system may lack internal and external communication skills. If they are not in the habit of communicating with parents and community members, their skills will likely be limited if they exist at all. In the past some schools have operated with very little internal communication among teachers. Teachers often had little if any time to communicate with their colleagues. In fact, they often worked more like isolated islands than as colleagues.

Initially communication is often viewed as a one-way process. "We will tell them what they need to know". The concept of two-way communication is more difficult to apply. The time and energy required for two-way communication to work is scarce in most schools and it is not viewed as important enough to warrant the expenditure of such precious resources as time and energy.

Communication appears continue to view through the mind set of independent systems and one-way communication is sufficient. Once the school is viewed as an

interdependent system the importance and need for two-way communication increases. (this links to systems theory)

3. Develop an understanding of the current **Context**

Every school and community has a past, a history that shapes how it views the world and interprets events. It is crucial that the facilitator and the design team develop a rich understanding of the multiple aspects of the current context. Much as current instructional research highlights the importance of meeting the learner where they are, schools must be met where they are. The idiosyncrasies of a community and a school must be considered when attempting to instigate change. They not only have the potential to trip up the effort but also to offer keys to finding the leverage needed for success.

4. Develop a design culture

Systemically designing a school is very different from planning and implementing solutions to current problems. Creating a school that is capable of continuous improvement requires a culture that is very different from what currently exist in most schools. They must learn to move past asking "are we doing things right", to asking "are we doing the right things right". Reflection and inquiry are essential to developing such a culture. Expectations and support structures must be put in place that will allow the participants to develop the skills needed to maintain this type of culture.

Guidelines:

A The design team should explore what it takes to systemically design a school system. Books and videos have been developed that discuss continuous improvement or learning organizations and these can be used to generate discussion among the team members.

B The leadership and administration must exhibit the behaviors that they desire to develop in the faculty and staff. Simply verbally supporting two-way communication will not be sufficient. They must seek and act on input they receive from all stakeholders, including teachers and parents. They should engage in reflection and inquiry and explain the processes as they use them. As they carry out task other members will be performing in the future, they must take the time to turn them in to learning opportunities. **Teaching** how they performed the task must become as important as performing the task itself.

C Design teams should be instructed in inquiry skills. If they are to own and take responsibility for the new system they must be allowed to collect and process the data themselves. They should be allowed to determine what data they need to collect and be given assistance in exploring collection and analyzes methods. Since the schools will be the ones utilizing the data they must own the collection process, the analysis, and the synthesis of the data.

<u>Reigeluth's Process Model with proposed modifications</u>

Initiation/Preparation Phase

1. Assessing the readiness of the community.
   - *** Facilitator go/no-go assessment**
   - *** Design team what/how assessment**
2. Get an outside facilitator.
3. Get commitment from all stakeholder groups.
   - *** Get quality and proper quantity of time**

*. **Develop rich understanding of current context**

4. Select an approach for the change effort.
5. Select participants for the coordinating council and design team.
   ***Stabilize team membership**
6. Prepare the participants.
   *** Develop knowledge bases**
   educational and instructional methods
   communication
7. Relate with non participants.
*. **Develop design culture**
   *** Inquiry and reflection skills**
   *** Support structures**

Design/Development Phase

8. Find common values and analyze learner and societal needs.
9. Develop core ideas and goals.
10. Develop an image, and design a systems of functions.
11. Design enabling systems.
12. Analyze the feasibility.

Implementation/Documentation Phase

13. Plan the implementation.
14. Implement the design.
15. Document the system.

Summary

Restructuring a school system is a difficult time consuming process. The nature of the task places the school in the position of not know where they are going or how to get there. A process to guide them as the discover their desired out come is very important. This case attempted to assistant an elementary school in initiating a process and to learn from their experiences as a means of helping other schools in the future.

The additions to the process model that have been suggest are grounded in the experiences of one school. Only by using this model with additional schools will we learn if they are beneficial and should remain a part of the model.

Many of the experience that emerged in this case represent global issues that may have solutions in the research of business, group dynamics and self-managed work groups. Drawing on the research from other areas is very important to developing additional guidelines and refinements. The researchers strongly encourage continued research in this area and the exploration of other research findings in order to better serve our schools and communities as they undertook the crucial task of restructuring education.

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